NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6301 DECEMBER 6, 1978
CHARLES WEISS/TEHRAN

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUGGLE IN IRAN

ANNCR:

AT HIS NEWS CONFERENCE ON TUESDAY, PRIME MINISTER GHOLAM-REZA AZAHRI SPOKE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE BEING WAGED IN IRAN. IN THAT CONTEXT, THE OPPOSITION TO THE SHAH IS FIGHTING ON AT LEAST AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH THE GOVERNMENT, AND ON SOME FRONTS MAY EVEN BE AHEAD. CHARLES WEISS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE CONSTANT ANXIETY FELT IN IRAN TODAY IS UNDENIABLY A STRAIN. PEOPLE CAN LEAVE, OUTGOING FLIGHTS ARE FULLY BOOKED, AND SOME AIRLINES ARE FLYING EXTRA PLANES IN EMPTY TO COPE WITH THE DEMAND. EVER SINCE FRIDAY NIGHT WHEN THE MOSLEM HOLY MONTH, THE MOHARREM, BEGAN. GUNFIRE HAS BEEN ECHOING THROUGHOUT TEHRAN -- OCCASIONALLY DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS. THE STATE RADIO AND TELEVISION REPORT ONLY THE BARE-BONES OF WHAT HAPPENS, IF AT ALL. FOR OVER A MONTH THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEWSPAPERS. THE POPULATION DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON A LIVELY RUMOR MILL TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON. A STUDENT FRIEND OF MINE SAYS WITH CONVICTION THAT AT LEAST FOUR THOUSAND PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE CAPITAL IN THE LATEST NIGHTLY CLASHES. OFFICIALLY THERE WERE THIRTEEN DEAD. MY FRIEND WAS PANTING HARD OVER THE PHONE. HE SAID HE HAD JUST RUN IN FROM THE LATES CONFRONTATION WITH THE ARMY ON THE STREETS. HE CAN BE REACHED AT HOME ONLY DURING CURFEW, OF COURSE. HE THEN TOLD THE STORY THAT SEEMED TO EXPLAIN ONE SIDE OF THE COIN, THE FANATIC RECKLESSNESS SHOWN BY THE OPPOSITION. HE SAID THAT ON SUNDAY HE HAD TAKEN PART IN A DEMONSTRATION WITH SIX OR SEVEN HUNDRED OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE. WITH OBVIOUS PRIDE AND EVEN RELISH, HE RELATED HOW THE ARMY OPENED FIRE ON THEM AND THAT AT LEAST FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE HAD BEEN KILLED AND MANY OTHERS WOUNDED.

THIS DEATH WISH IN THE SERVICE OF GETTING RID OF THE SHAH IS INSTITUTIONALIZED IN CALLS PUT OUT BY THE MAN WHO HAS BECOME A SYMBOL FOR THE DISSIDENTS, THE EXILED SHIITE MOSLEM LEADER, AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI. HE URGES HIS FOLLOWERS TO CONFRONT THE TROOPS ALREADY DRESSED IN THE WINDING ROBES USED FOR THE MOSLEM DEAD AND THERE ARE INSTANCES THAT THEY DO IT. THE OTHER DAY A TAXI DRIVER ASKED ME TO SIT WITH HIM IN THE FRONT SEAT GOING THROUGH TOWN. IF I SIT IN BACK, HE SAID, THE TROUBLE PEOPLE AS HE CALLED THEM MIGHT THINK I WAS A RICH MAN AND HE MADE THE MOTION OF MOWING SOMEONE DOWN WITH A MACHINE GUN. THROUGH IT ALL, THE ARMY REMAINS LOYAL AND IMPASSIVE. TRUCKLOADS OF SOLDIERS STAND GUARD AT SENSITIVE POINTS IN THE CITY. SO FAR, THERE HAS BEEN ONLY SCATTERED AND, FOR THE MOST PART, UNDOCUMENTED REPORTS OF ARMED COUNTER ATTACKS FROM THE TROOPS.

ACCORDING TO THE PRIME MINISTER, THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE ARE BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SHAH. AT THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH NEWSMEN TUESDAY, GENERAL AZAHRI TOLD THE STORY OF HOW HE HAD VENTURED OUT IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES AND UNGUARDED ONE DAY THIS WEEK. HE WAS RECOGNIZED, OF COURSE, AND A HUNDRED OR SO PEOPLE CROWDED AROUND." THEY TOOK ME TO THEIR BOSOM AND WEPT, HE SAID WITH PATHOS. THEY LOVE THE SHAH." BUT, ASIDE FROM THE VIOLENCE THERE ARE ALSO THE LITTLE THINGS THAT KEEP UNRAVELING THE FABRIC OF NORMAL DAY-TO-DAY LIVING. ALL SCHOOLS FROM THE SECONDARY LEVEL UP ARE CLOSED AN IN TEHRAN, ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AS WELL. CONTACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S BUREAUCRACY IS A CHANCY ADVENTURE. AS LIKELY AS NOT, THE STAFF WILL BE OUT ON STRIKE OR WORKING TO RULE. ONE WESTERN DIPLOMAT SAID BITTERLY

THAT ALL CIVIL SERVANTS ARE DOING NOW IS DRAWING UP PAYROLL AND VACATION LISTS. THE AYATOLLAH IN PARIS KEEPS UP A STEADY DRUMBEAT OF STRIKE CALLS. IN THE PAST WEEK SHOPS IN TEHRAN HAVE BEEN OPEN OR CLOSED ON A COMPLETELY ARBITRARY SCHEDULE. THE WALKOUTS HAVE ALSO HIT THE REFINERIES. GASOLINE HAS FREQUENTLY BEEN IN SHORT SUPPLY AND FILLING STATIONS WOULD RATION IT OUT AT TWENTY LITERS TO A CUSTOMER. THE CITY IS OFTEN BLACKED OUT BY POWER STOPPAGES. BOTTLED GAS IS NO LONGER DELIVERED TO HOMES. AND FINALLY, THERE'S THE LARGER PICTURE OF WHAT THE UNREST IS DOING TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY. AT THE AYATOLLAH'S BIDDING, OIL FIELD WORKERS HAVE CUT PRODUCTION BY MORE THAN A THIRD -- WITH THE SHORTFALL GROWING DAILY. THE LOSS TO THE HARD PRESSED IRANIAN TREASURY IS AS MUCH AS THIRTY FIVE MILLION DOLLARS A DAY AND GETTING WORSE. (OPT) THE NATURAL GAS PIPELINE TO THE SOVIET UNION HAS ALSO BEEN PUT OUT OF OPERATION, WHILE MUCH OF THE COUNTRY'S INDUSTRY IS SHUT DOWN BY PERIODIC ELECTRICITY STOPPAGES. AND EVEN WORSE THINGS COULD COME. HOLY MONTH OBSERVANCES CLIMAX IN THE THREE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE ASHURA HOLIDAY, DECEMBER ELEVENTH. (END OPT)

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WJL/RD